First of a Series on

THE CHAO FAMILY OF CHINA

CHINA—INTRODUCTION

by

EDITH FLEMING

Raymond Foundation

Museum Stories, No. 358

March 5, 1960

China

The story of China is the story of people. Everywhere one goes in China there are people: people on farms, people in the towns, in the cities, even crowded on houseboats in the rivers—hundreds of millions of people. Most of them are farmers working very hard from early morning until dark to eke out a living from their tiny plots of land.

The Chinese have a saying that a farmer does not need to go to school to study agriculture. All he needs is to copy what his neighbor does, for Chinese farmers have worked their fields in the very same way for hundreds and hundreds of years. In the old days they had no machinery to help them—no jeeps or tractors. They did most of the work on their little farms by hand, working far harder than farmers in this country do, never wasting anything, never complaining, never sparing themselves.

Though China is a huge country, much of it is poor farm land: snow-covered mountains, deserts, and tropical forests. So most of the people live packed together in the valleys and on the deltas of rivers. The rivers are roads for carrying goods from the farms to the cities. Even small streams that would seem too shallow for navigation serve as waterways because the Chinese build shallow boats and rafts and even make floats of blown-up skins to use on such streams. The people of China are very skilled and ingenious.

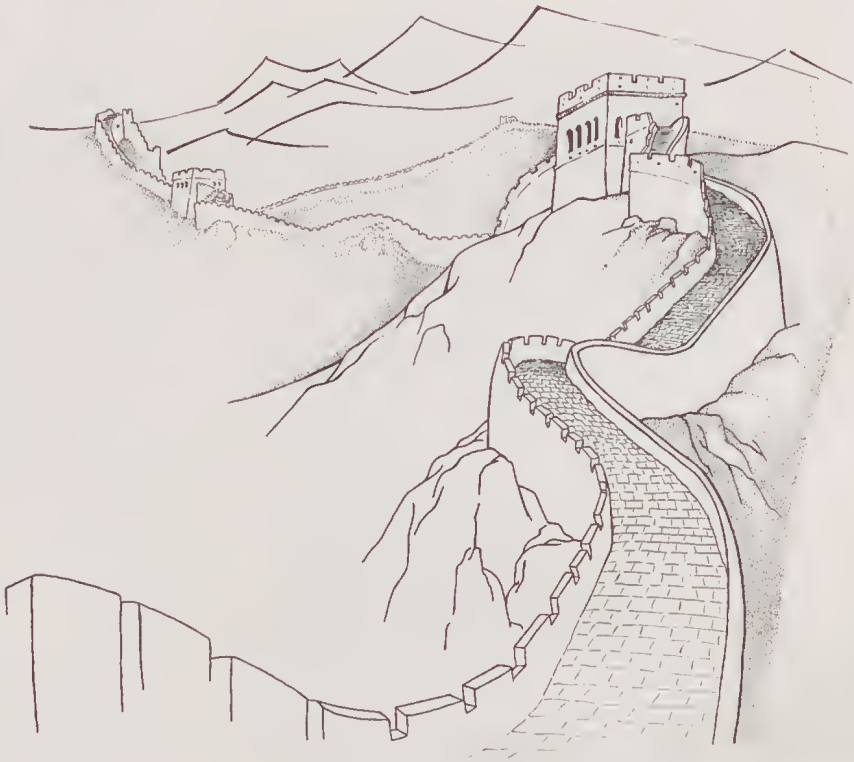
China is a very old country. Even in the time of the Roman Empire, China had a long history behind her. Five hundred years before the birth of Christ, Confucius, the great philosopher, lived and taught and laid down rules for moral living. His teachings and those of other great Chinese philosophers are called the Classics, and for hundreds and hundreds of years schoolboys had to study and learn these writings by heart.

Three hundred years after Confucius, when barbarian tribes were living in Europe, China had built a great empire. About this time one of the emperors built the Great Wall to keep out wandering tribes from Central Asia. The wall winds over hills and valleys and rivers for 1500 miles and is sometimes as wide

as fifteen feet across the top. Every hundred yards there is a fortified tower. The wall is the longest structure ever built, one of the seven wonders of the world.

During much of her history China has kept herself away from the world. The ocean formed a barrier, the tropical forests shut her off from Indochina, and the Himalaya mountains cut her off from India. Today great changes are going on in China, speeded by modern transportation and radio.

The stories that follow are about a China that is disappearing. But to understand the China of today you must know the customs and traditions that have gone before. So these stories will tell you of the country of China and the Chao children who grew up under the old ways. You will read about them, their life in the city, and their visits to the village and the farm of their Grandfather Wong. The stories will give you a glimpse of the China of yesterday.



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Second of a Series on

THE CHAO FAMILY OF CHINA

GREEN RICE-PADDIES AND YELLOW DUST

by

EDITH FLEMING

Raymond Foundation

Museum Stories, No. 359

March 12, 1960

Green Rice-paddies and Yellow Dust

The vast country of China is cut into two parts, and if you were to visit there you would see many differences between the two sections, North China and South China.

South China is warm and rainy. The country looks green, carpeted with tiny rice-paddies, for here the people live mostly on rice. Hills and mountains break up the land, but every scrap of soil possible is turned into fields, sometimes so small that they are almost like gardens. Little villages of bamboo homes thatched with rice straw dot the countryside. The warm weather and the heavy rains make it possible for the farmers to raise two or three crops a year. So in spite of the tiny farms they are able to make a living.

The Yangtze, the great river of the South, is a way of life to the people. Its waters irrigate their fields, the mud carried down by its strong current makes the land fertile, and the river itself with the system of canals forms a highway for trading boats carrying farm goods from the villages and towns to the great cities.

Now that we have had a look at South China let us travel to North China. The landscape changes from green fields to a yellow and brown treeless plain. In the winter yellow dust from the loess hills of north and northwest China blows across

the country, turning everything gritty and yellow. Travel is difficult, for the back roads are thick with dust or are quagmires if it rains. Sometimes carts with solid wooden wheels cut through the mud or dust, but the most common sight on the roads is a heavy wheelbarrow loaded with farm goods trundled by the hard-working farmer, often over many miles. Recently the ancient roads between the large cities have been improved and great trucks thunder along them.

The climate of North China is difficult. Some years there is a drought, and the earth dries and parches, the crops wither, and there is no food for the hungry. Other years the rains may come too suddenly and the great river of the North, the Yellow River, floods, burying thousands of farms and villages beneath water and mud.

With its cooler climate and uncertain rainfall, North China is not a rice-growing country. Its farmers raise wheat, barley, and a type of sorghum called kaoliang. Some of the farmers live alone on farms as farmers do in this country, but most of them live in tiny villages and go out to their land every day, where they work until night comes. Their homes are built of sun-dried gray mud or, in the mountainous areas, of stone. The roof is set on wooden rafters covered with stalks of kaoliang plastered together with mud. In the dry season the mud roof cracks, and when the rains begin it leaks. But after it is well soaked, the farmer climbs up and tramples it with his feet until it is solid and weatherproof.

The people of North China do not look like those of South China. They are usually taller and more rugged. We in America know the people of South China better because most Chinese in this country come from the country around Canton in South China. But from the history books one learns more about North China, for the traditional Chinese civilization started there and spread gradually southward. The Cathay, or China, of Marco Polo was really North China. But the most active trade was in the South, where commerce with the outside world was carried on, even though Peking, the traditional capital city of China, is in the North.

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MONGOLIA
KOREA
PEKING
YELLOW RIVER
YANGTZE RIVER
FORMOSA
BURMA
INDIA
SIAM
INDOCHINA
GREAT WALL
LINE OF DIVISION BETWEEN NORTH AND SOUTH CHINA

China

Third of a Series on

THE CHAO FAMILY OF CHINA

PEKING—NORTHERN CAPITAL

by

EDITH FLEMING

Raymond Foundation

CHICAGO NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM
RESEARCH EDUCATION
FOUNDED 1893 BY MARSHALL FIELD

Museum Stories, No. 360

March 19, 1960

Peking—Northern Capital

The city of Peking is very old. Its name means Northern Capital, and for hundreds of years, off and on, it has been the capital of China. It is a walled city with wide streets connecting the beautiful main gates and many lanes and alleys leading in all directions from them.

Along one of these streets Mr. Chao and his grandson, Elder Brother, are walking home after a shopping trip. They turn off into one of the narrow lanes, and we hurry so that we will not lose sight of them in the crowds coming and going. Shops built along the side of the lanes have open fronts so that we can see right into them. One shop sells roast duck, another roast mutton, and over there is a wayside place where a man can roast his own. There are shops with vegetables too: beans, green peppers, kohlrabi, broad beans, and baskets full of wheat and barley. Peddlers carrying trays of peanuts and roasted sweet potatoes shout their wares.

We pass Chinese houses that all look alike from the outside because there are no windows facing the street, only a blank wall with a brightly painted gate. The gate of the Chao home is open, and grandfather and grandson are just going through. A large tile screen shuts off our view, for the family does not want passers-by staring in or neighbors spying to see if there is any new furniture. They like privacy.

Mr. Chao knows us and, catching sight of us, invites us in. Behind the screen are three-roomed bungalows built around open courts where the family likes to spend the time in good weather. It is pretty there, with oleander and pomegranite trees shading a large pottery goldfish bowl that holds Grandfather Chao's choice goldfish. Raising goldfish is his hobby, and his grandchildren like to help him.

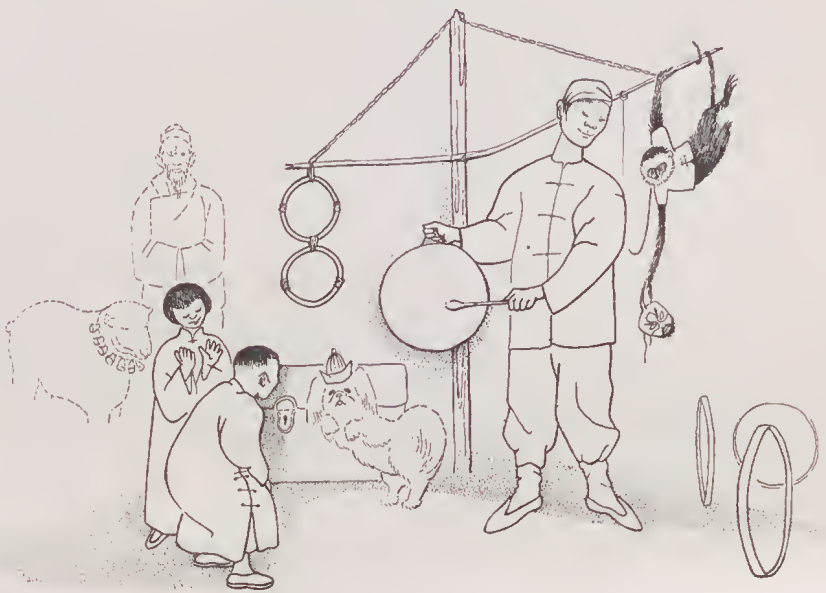
Grandfather and Grandmother Chao, their son and his wife, and their three children live together. Elder Brother is twelve, his sister Lotus is eight, and Little Brother is six. Grandfather is the head of the family and everyone is respectful to him, because in old China people honor old age. Grandfather is proud

because he is old and feels pleased if anyone asks his age. "Still young," he says. "Seventy-one."

While we are talking, a horn sounds in the street. "The horn man!" shout the children and run to the gate. While we watch, he makes the horns by rolling some leaves together and fastening them with a thorn. There is one for each of the children. Little Brother blows with all his might, and the horn falls apart almost before the horn man is out of sight.

Sometimes traveling entertainers come to the Chao house. Once there was a "monkey circus" with two men who had trained a monkey, a Pekinese dog, and a sheep. The monkey put on a cute jacket and imitated a ricksha puller. When his master beat a gong, he did fancy swings on a bamboo pole and the dog jumped through a hoop and walked on his hind legs. The last trick was the best of all, when the monkey rode on the sheep's back around the courtyard like a jockey on a race horse. After it was over Grandfather Chao paid a small fee for the entertainment, and the circus folded up and started away in search of another family who would like to be entertained.

Peking is a very old city where life went on year after year in very much the same way. Many of the games and entertainments that the Chao children like so well pleased Grandfather Chao when he was a boy, and his grandfather before him.



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Fourth of a Series on

THE CHAO FAMILY OF CHINA

SHOPPING IN PEKING

by

EDITH FLEMING

Raymond Foundation

Museum Stories, No. 361

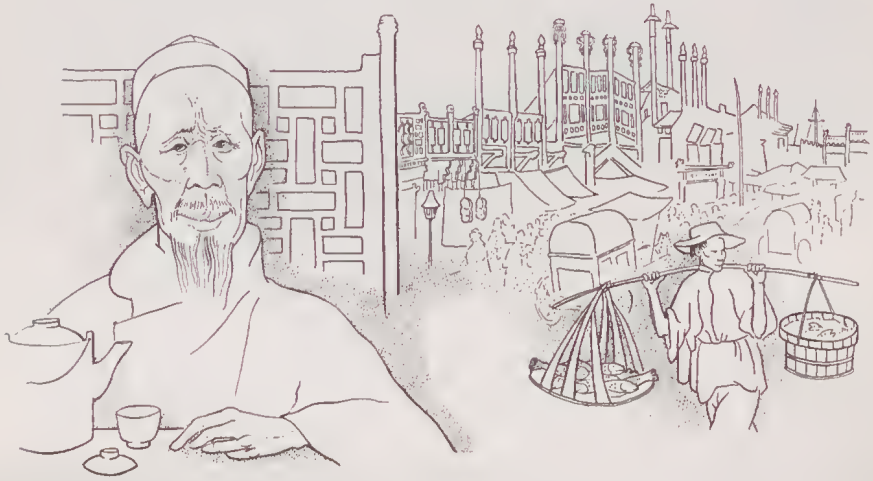
March 26, 1960

Shopping in Peking

The streets of Peking teem with crowds of peddlers who fill the air with the noise of gongs, drums, and their own loud cries as they hawk their wares. All this noise is to attract the attention of the families living in typical Chinese fashion behind walls that shut them off from the street. For hundreds of years the Chinese housewife had done her shopping at home instead of going to the store. This is because in the old days women and children were seldom allowed to leave home. They could only dream of going to the shops. Instead, the shops came to them. Times are different now, and women can shop for themselves, but peddlers still swarm the streets.

Every spring, farm boys come to the big city to sell tadpoles and little fish that they have caught in the streams on their father's farm. They peddle them through the streets, chanting a tune about their wares. Over their shoulders they carry a long pole with a round tub on one end and a basket on the other. The tub is partitioned and filled with water. In one side the tadpoles swim, in the other the fish. Every year the Chao children buy the tadpoles and the fish with big eyes.

Young Mrs. Chao, of course, is more interested in food for the family than in tadpoles and little fish. She buys many things from the peddlers, but much of the food nowadays comes from the wayside stands down the street. The fruit vendor calls his wares. "Come and eat a piece of watermelon here! My



melons are the size of a bushel basket and the slices are as big as a boat. Come buy! Come buy my melons!"

Old Mr. Chao likes to do a little shopping sometimes, and then he goes to his favorite teashop to rest and to visit with his old friends. There are fancy teashops along the important streets and pleasant comfortable ones dotted along the lanes and alleys and near historic places where sightseers go.

Mr. Chao has his favorite shop where he sits on a bench at one of the long tables and chats with his friends. The waiter knows him and hurries to bring him a pot of tea. From time to time he brings more boiling water to add to the tea leaves. As the hours go by and more and more water is added, the color of the tea grows lighter and lighter until no color is left.

Before the grandchildren were old enough to go to school, their grandfather used to like to bring them to the teashop, but now, like most of the old men, he brings his bird for company. They listen to the bird songs and compare their good points. Each one is sure his bird is best. Most of the men do not eat, but a few buy peanuts or melon seeds from peddlers who come to the tables. They discuss business and the same things are said over and over as latecomers join the crowd, and the air grows blue with tobacco smoke. It is only when it grows late and the tea has no color left in it that Grandfather Chao and his friends pay for their tea and go home. Some of the old men go back in the evening, but Grandfather Chao likes to stay with his family then. He is proud of his fine grandchildren.

"Why do you go to the teashop every day?" asks Little Brother.

"The teashop is an important place all over China," says Grandfather Chao, "in the market towns as well as in the city. Farmers from the little villages come to the market towns every day too, just to drink tea and to talk business. Even the poor farmers come, because if they stay home someone might think they are too poor to afford a pot of tea and that would be bad for their credit. So everyone comes whether he can afford it or not. Yes, the teashop is very important in China, an age-old custom for all men to enjoy."

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Fifth of a Series on

THE CHAO FAMILY OF CHINA

GRANDFATHER WONG'S BIRTHDAY PARTY

by

EDITH FLEMING

Raymond Foundation

CHICAGO NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM
RESEARCH EDUCATION
FOUNDED 1893 BY MARSHALL FIELD

Museum Stories, No. 362

April 2, 1960

Grandfather Wong's Birthday Party

The Chao children are all ready to start on a trip to visit their grandparents, the Wongs, their mother's people. They are taking a train from their home in Peking to a small city many miles away. Everyone is excited, for they travel very little and they know the train ride will be a thing to remember.

The children live with their father's family, of course, but several times in a year their mother, young Mrs. Chao, takes them home to visit their other grandparents. Usually this is the day after an important holiday so Grandfather and Grandmother Wong will not be left out completely. But this is a different kind of a visit and a more important one, for Grandfather Wong will be seventy years old and his children are planning a great feast and birthday party for him.

Little Brother would like very much to have a birthday party himself, but he knows it will be many years before he can have one. In China only elderly people are given a celebration, for they are the important ones in the family. This is Grandfather Wong's third big party, or "long-life party." He had one when he was fifty, another when he was sixty, and now he is very pleased to have reached the important age of seventy and so be able to have his third long-life party.

For weeks the sons of the wealthy Wong family have been busy planning the party. They sent out invitations with gold characters written on red, for red is the color of happiness.

The country home of the Wongs is too far away and so the celebration is to be held in the city. Grandfather Wong is a merchant, and so are most of his sons; so they have decided to hold the three-day celebration in the guild hall. It is a fine place, with a front section for a theatre, the middle part an open court, and the third section a big hall.

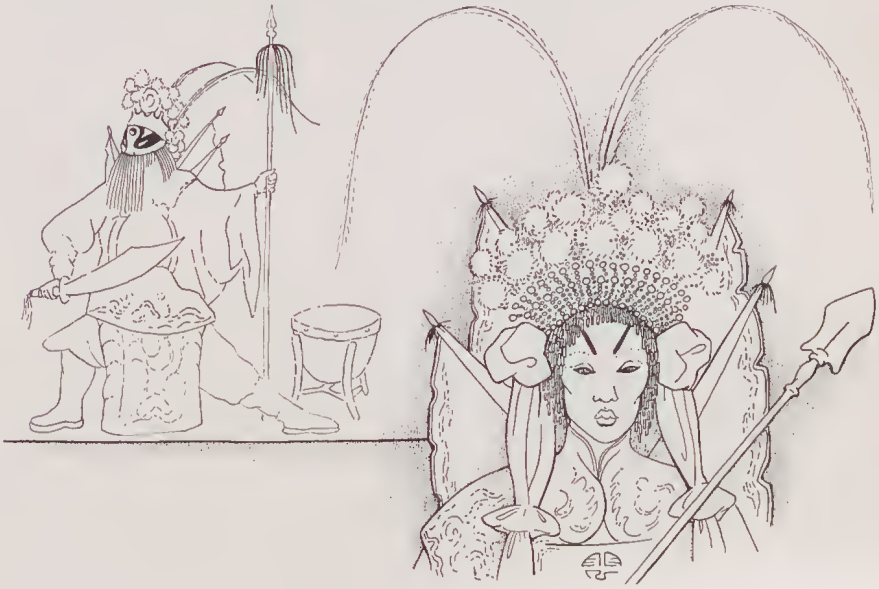
The uncles are at the train to meet the Chao children and their mother, and they all go to the guild hall. "Birthday presents have been coming for days," says one of the uncles. "Your grandfather has many friends. See the silk banners covered with good wishes written in gold characters, and the boxes of

tea, and all the material for new clothes. We are using the banners for decoration. Look at this one. It is ten feet long and six feet wide. It tells the story of your grandfather's life, his shops, his family, his house and his farm, and all his public services. It even tells of his sons and grandsons who are following his wise teachings."

"Please tell us about the celebration," asks Elder Brother.

"On the first day," says the uncle, "we have invited the merchants who do business with your grandfather, together with their families. There are tables for them in the main hall and actors will put on plays in the theatre. The most important play will be in honor of old age. The entertainment will last all day and most of the night, and outsiders will be allowed to stand in the open court and watch. On the second day will be another celebration, but this time the guests will be city officials. On the third day friends and relatives of your uncles and cousins will come to honor your grandfather."

The Chao children look at the presents and the banners with their words of praise for Grandfather Wong and at the uncles' smiling faces, and they feel proud and happy. Everyone in the whole district as well as in the city will be impressed. Grandfather Wong is an important man who is having his third long-life party because he has reached the age of seventy.



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Sixth of a Series on

THE CHAO FAMILY OF CHINA

A TRIP TO GRANDFATHER WONG'S FARM

by

EDITH FLEMING

Raymond Foundation

Museum Stories, No. 363

April 9, 1960

A Trip to Grandfather Wong's Farm

This is the day that the Chao children and their mother are going to Grandfather Wong's farm. A two-wheeled cart is waiting at the gate, and Grandfather and Grandmother Wong, the three children, and their mother pile in. The cart has no springs. It starts off with a jerk and jounces and bumps over the rough road, but nobody minds because everything is new and different in the country and there are many things to see.

"Now we are getting close to the Wong village," says Grandfather at last. "See, there is one of our fields over there and there is another. The fields are small and scattered so that each family can have some good land and some poor."

In the fields the men are harvesting the millet and soy beans by hand. "It will soon be time to plant the winter wheat," says Grandfather who, though he is a merchant, knows all about farming because he grew up on the farm.

"What is that growing over there?" asks Little Brother.

"I know," says Elder Brother, "sweet potatoes and peanuts."

"Poor people raise sweet potatoes and peanuts," says Grandfather, "because they are cheap and the vines are good for cattle feed. But it is hard work. I would rather raise wheat."

Now they are riding through the village, which is one long street built beside the river with alleys branching from it.

"Why is there such a high bank where the river turns?" asks

Little Brother, who is looking everywhere.

"To keep the river from flooding," the cart driver tells him. "Last year there was a great flood that carried away much good farm land. We built the bank to try to keep that from happening another time."

A few old people are sitting in the sun with their backs to the wall. "Everything is just the same," says Mrs. Chao, who grew up in the village. "I remember that the old people used to sit there even in the winter."

"But why don't they stay in the house in the winter?" asks Little Brother, who wants to know everything.

"Their houses along the alleys are small and dark and full of smoke," his mother tells him. "It is better to sit outdoors in the sun if it isn't too cold. Only the good houses along the river are comfortable to stay in."

But today everyone is happy outdoors. It is August, and the country is pretty. The gardens are green with cabbages, string beans, and turnips. A few fruit trees grow at the edge of each garden. Some women washing clothes on the river dike laugh and chatter at their work.

"Everyone is busy," says Little Brother.

"In our old-fashioned village everyone works," says Grandfather, "and all for the family. Even your littlest farm cousins do what they can to help. When I was a young man and set myself up as a merchant, I worked hard for my family, sending home all my earnings except just enough to live on. Your uncles do the same. That is why we can buy new farm land and have the best house in the village," he adds proudly as they draw up in front of his fine house.

It is after sunset before the men come home from the fields. Supper is ready and, according to custom, the men eat first and the women wait on them. After supper the men go to the threshing floor at the edge of the village for a social time.

Grandfather Wong is happy. "This is the life of the farmer —getting up early, working hard all day, a little good talk at night, and market day six times a month when we do business and have a visit with our relatives."

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Seventh of a Series on

THE CHAO FAMILY OF CHINA

MARKET DAY

by

EDITH FLEMING

Raymond Foundation

Museum Stories, No. 364

April 23, 1960

Market Day

The Chao children are visiting their Grandfather Wong's stores in the market town today. Grandfather Wong is a rich merchant who has made his money in his country stores as well as in the city near by. But his family home is in the little village where Grandmother lives and where one of his sons runs the farm. His other sons work for him in the stores. Grandfather is old now, but he still goes to work every day.

The town is much larger than the little village where the Wongs live. The farmers from twenty villages around come here to trade their farm goods for things they need. In the big central square a market is held six times in every month. Today traders are beginning to set up their stalls there, for tomorrow is market day when people come to town from all the villages around to do their trading.

"Many more will come tomorrow," Grandfather Wong tells the children. "There will be butchers and country merchants with bags of wheat flour and bales of spun yarn, and carpenters will come with furniture and farm tools."

"I can smell fish," says Little Brother.

"Yes," says Grandfather, "there are traders in dried fish and fruits and in pottery too. Tomorrow the farmers will come with the fresh fruits and vegetables and firewood. Some will drive pigs and cattle. There is a special place for the livestock, and the fuel market is over by the river. Of course, there are other people who have nothing to sell but only want to buy. All this is very good for business," says Grandfather and rubs his hands together at the thought.

Early the next morning a great hubbub breaks out in the square. Trading has begun. People shout as they bargain and call across to their friends. How the Chao children love it! They go from booth to booth and buy candy and toys. By noon the noise is at its loudest, but as the day goes on, the crowds begin to thin. Now the children can hear each other talk.

"I wish we could be here for the fair," says Elder Brother. "There are two fairs a year, and they are even better than mar-

ket day. The one last year lasted three days."

"I remember," says Little Brother. "They had plays that went on all day, one after the other. I liked the war plays best."

"Everyone is leaving here," says Elder Brother after awhile. "Let's go to the store. There is always a crowd there."

That is true, for the relatives from the other villages always trade at Grandfather's stores and pay their debts three times a year and always at New Year's.

"New Year's is the real holiday," says Elder Brother. "All the stores are closed for three days, the only time that happens all the year long."

Grandfather had been very busy all day, but now he can rest a little, for the farmers are leaving to go to the teahouse. "They will have a chance to talk to their relatives from other villages," says Grandfather. "It is cheaper for them to meet here in the town than to go from village to village. They get the news from the whole countryside and carry back reports of all the uncles and aunts and cousins.

"Grandfather Chao goes to the teashop too," says Little Brother. "When I grow up I will go there myself."

"That is right," says Grandfather Wong. "The teahouse is a good place for business, friends, and news."

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Eighth of a Series on

THE CHAO FAMILY OF CHINA

CHINESE SCHOOLDAYS

by

EDITH FLEMING

Raymond Foundation

Museum Stories, No. 365

April 30, 1960

Chinese Schooldays

The Chao children are home again after their vacation in the country, and Elder Brother and his sister Lotus are going back to school. Little Brother is very excited because he too is going to start school. The others have been going for years, and all day long Little Brother has been asking questions. "What is school like?" "What will I have to do there?"

"I will tell you what school was like when I was a boy," says his father. "But, of course, things have changed since then. I had no brothers and sisters, you know, and my parents decided to keep me at home until I was seven. But my father said that I must learn my characters so that I wouldn't be behind others of my age. It was hard work learning, but when I complained my father said I was lucky. Children in poor families had to work so hard around the house and on the farm that they had no time to learn to read and write."

"How did you learn?" asks Little Brother.

"My father brought home a set of characters stamped in red and set me to tracing them with brush and ink. I sat for hours working until I could make a perfect character without retouching. At first it was drudgery, but when I could do it well I began to like it. But I was very lonely."

"Didn't you have any friends?" asks Little Brother.

"No, but when I was seven I started to go to a small private school not far from home. I made friends with the other boys, and we walked to and from school together. But I didn't like the school. It was called a 'shop school' and all we did was to learn our lessons out of a book. It was worse than staying at home by myself.

"The teacher, Mr. Yung, was very old. He had wanted to be a scholar and had studied for the government examinations in the Classics, which they don't give any more. If he had passed he would have been an important man and everyone would have looked up to him. But he failed. The only thing left for him was to open a private school to be sure of a 'steady rice bowl.' He didn't like teaching, and he didn't care whether

we understood the Classics we were reading so long as we could say them perfectly. 'Close your books,' he would say, and all twenty of us would shout the lesson together at the top of our lungs. Afterwards we recited one by one, and if a boy made a mistake he would get a beating."

"I wouldn't like to go to that school," says Little Brother.

"The only time we had fun," says his father, "was when the teacher was away. Then we threw paper balls and played war. There were always small boys on guard to watch for the teacher, and as I was small I usually had the job. I would give the alarm and everyone would tidy up and we would be sitting quietly in our seats before he got there.

"When I was eight I started in a large public school, and that was very good. We didn't study the Classics, but read stories of modern Chinese boys and girls, written in everyday language with beautiful pictures to illustrate them. It was all very modern with blackboards and crayons, and we stayed in that school until we went to high school. Some of the boys even went to college."

"We have gym in our school," says Elder Brother politely, for in China the young speak respectfully to their elders. "And we study mathematics and science. We like school. Everyone admires us as we go along the street in our school uniforms."

"Yes," says Grandfather, who had been listening. "China has always admired her scholars. It was true in the old days too. But times are changing. The China that you children will know is going to be very different from my China and the China of your father. Who knows what will happen? As for me, I like the old ways best."

中國小學

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